**The Black Cat**

By Edgar Allan Poe, adapted by R. Davis

For this crazy and simple story I am about to write, I neither expect nor beg you to believe it. I would be crazy to expect anyone else to believe it, when I myself have trouble with the evidence I experienced. Yet, I am not crazy, and I was not dreaming. Tomorrow, I will die, but today I will tell you my story and unburden my soul. My purpose in doing this is to place before the world, in a plain, to the point manner, and without my opinion, a series of simple events that happened at my house. The consequences of these simple events have terrified, tortured, and totally destroyed me. I will not attempt to go into unnecessary detail. To me, these events have given only horror. To many people, they may seem less terrible than everyday irregular events. Maybe some really smart person may read these events and find my horrible true story only a series of commonplace occurrences. A person, perhaps you, with a more calm, more logical, and far less excitable mind than my own, that can reduce these events, that I view in horror, to nothing more than an ordinary progression of natural causes and effects.

From the time I was a baby, I was known for my calm and kind character. My tenderness of heart was so obvious that I was often made fun of by my friends. I was especially fond of animals, and my parents provided me with a wide variety of pets. I spent most of my time with my pets and was never happier than when I was feeding and petting them. This odd characteristic continued as I grew older. When I grew into manhood, it was one of the main pleasures in my life. To those of you reading, that have loved the affection and faithfulness of a wise dog, I don’t really need to explain the joy one may get from owning a pet. There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of an animal that makes one wonder at the weak and unfaithful friendships we have with people.

I married early and was happy to find in my wife a ***disposition*** similar to my own. Seeing my love for pets, she bought many very nice ones for me. We had birds, goldfish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat.

The cat was a very large and beautiful animal. It was entirely black and extremely ***sagacious***. In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was a bit superstitious, used to comment on the ancient idea that all black cats were witches in disguise. Not that she was ever serious upon this point, and I mention it for no better reason than I just now remembered it.

I named the cat Pluto, and he was my favorite pet and playmate. I was the only one who fed him, and he followed me everywhere I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could keep him from following me through the streets.

Our friendship lasted, like this, for several years, during which I began to develop a bad habit of not controlling my drinking. It caused me to experience a radical change for the worse in my behavior. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, and less caring for the feelings of others. I cursed at my wife, and after a while, I began to physically abuse her. My pets also were victims of my change of ***disposition***. I not only neglected them but treated them badly. For Pluto, however, I still had enough feeling left to keep me from treating him badly. I had no problem, however, in mistreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when by accident, or through affection, they came near me. But my disease grew upon me, for what disease is like alcoholism! After a time, even Pluto, who was now becoming old and a bit peevish, began to experience the effects of my ill temper.

One night, returning home much intoxicated from one of my haunts about time, I had the idea that Pluto was avoiding my presence. I reached down and grabbed him; when in his fright at my violence, he bit me slightly with his teeth. The anger of a demon instantly possessed me. It made me so mad that I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed at once to leave my body, and I was taken over by an evil, alcohol driven anger throughout my body. I reached into my pocket, found my pocket knife, opened it, and while holding Pluto by the throat, cut one of his eyes from its socket. I blush now as I tell you about this horrible ***atrocity*** that I committed.

When I sobered up the next morning from my night of drinking, I felt regret and horror for the crime I had committed against Pluto. It was, however, a weak feeling, and my soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess and soon drowned in wine all memory of my crime.

In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. I had a little bit of my old heart left as to be at first bothered by his evident dislike of me. This feeling, however, soon gave way to irritation. This irritation grew until it pushed me to the point of no return, and I became overcome with the spirit of ***perverseness.*** There is nothing that makes sense about the spirit of ***perverseness.*** Yet, I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that ***perverseness*** is one of the main characteristics and main feelings that give make people the kind of humans they are. Does this confuse you? Think about it. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself doing a stupid or evil thing, for no other reason, than you know you are not supposed to do it? Don’t we all have a constant willingness to break that which we view as LAW even when we know we should not? This spirit of ***perverseness***, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was a deep longing of the soul to ***vex*** itself, to offer violence to its own nature, to do wrong simply because it was wrong, that forced me to continue and finally draw to a conclusion the injury I had committed upon the innocent Pluto. One morning, in cold blood, I slipped a noose about Pluto’s neck and hung him to a limb in a tree in our yard. Tears streamed from my eyes and regret entered my heart, but I hung him anyway because I knew that he had loved me and had given me no reason for doing such evil to him. I knew that in doing this I was committing a deadly sin that would ***jeopardize*** my soul and place it, if such a thing were possible, even beyond the mercy of the most merciful and most terrible God.

The night after I committed this cruel deed, I was awakened from sleep by people yelling, “Fire” outside my house. The curtains in my bedroom were consumed with flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife and I were able to escape the ***conflagration*.** The destruction of our house was complete. All my worldly wealth and possessions were consumed by fire, and I was very depressed at the loss.

I am not so weak minded as to say that my horrible deed had anything to do with the fire. I am simply telling you the chain of events that happened in my life and do not wish to leave any detail out. On the day after the fire, I visited the ruins of my home. All of the walls, except one, had fallen in. The wall still standing was in the middle of the house and was directly behind where my bed used to be. The plaster on this wall was newly refinished before the fire, and I figured this was why it was still standing. As I neared the wall, there was a crowd of people gathered around it examining it very carefully. I overheard people saying things like, “Strange! Very odd! Can you believe that?” This excited my curiosity and as I neared the wall I saw an image of a gigantic cat as if it had been carved in the plaster. The impression was extremely accurate, and the image was complete with a rope around the animal’s neck.

When I first looked upon this ghostly image, for I could hardly think anything else at the time, my wonder and terror were extreme. After a bit of thinking though, I began to figure it out. The cat, I remembered, had been hung in the garden beside my house. When people began to yell, on the night of the fire, someone must have cut down the cat and thrown it through my bedroom window in an attempt to wake me. The falling walls must have pressed the cat’s remains into the fresh plaster and caused the figure I was looking at on the only standing wall.

Although I had figured out what had happened, it still left a deep impression upon my mind. For months I could not get the ghostly image of the cat from my mind. During this time, there came back into my spirit a half feeling that seemed, but was not, regret for my deed. I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal and began to look about the horrible drinking places I went to for another cat that looked similar as a replacement.

One night as I sat, barely conscious, in a bar known for being involved in illegal drugs and prostitution, my attention was drawn to a black object resting its head on one of the huge kegs of gin, or rum, which made up most of the furniture in this place. I stared at this object for some time and must have been really drunk not to have figured out what it was to start with. I staggered closer to it and touched it with my hand. It was a black cat. It was as large as Pluto and was just like him except for one thing. Pluto was totally black, but this cat had a shapeless patch of white around the area of its breast.

Upon touching him, he immediately arose, purred loudly, rubbed against my hand, and appeared happy with the attention I was giving him. This was the very animal I had been looking for. I at once offered to buy it from the barkeeper, but he said he didn’t know where the cat came from and had never seen it before.

I continued rubbing the cat, and when I prepared to leave, the animal wanted to go home with me. I let it do so, and occasionally stooped and rubbed it as I proceeded. When I reached the house, it became a house cat at once and became an immediate favorite with my wife.

For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising inside me. This was just the opposite of what I thought would happen. I don’t know how or why its evident fondness for me began to disgust and annoy me. After a while, this disgust and annoyance gave way to a bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame and remembering my earlier deed of cruelty, kept me from physically abusing it. I did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently treat it. It took a long time, but I began to look upon the beast with an extreme hatred and ran from its presence as if it work some kind of awful, deadly disease.

What added to my hatred was something I discovered on the morning after I brought it home. This cat, like Pluto, was also missing one of its eyes. This fact only made him dearer to my wife. She had kept that same tenderness of heart and care of animals that was once such a big part of my life.

With my hatred of the cat growing, it seemed to become even more fond of me. It followed me everywhere I went with great attention that would be hard to explain. Whenever I sat, it would lie beneath my chair or jump up on my knees and touch me with its paws. If I arose to walk, it would get between my feet and nearly trip me. It would often fasten its sharp claws into my clothes and climb up to my chest. At such times, although I wanted to destroy it with a blow, I kept myself from doing this. I withheld from so doing partly by the memory of my former crime but mainly, let me confess, because I had a total dread of this beast.

This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil, but I don’t know any other way to describe it. I am almost ashamed to admit, even in this **felon’s cell**, the terror and horror this animal caused had been increased by a monstrous fur pattern hardly understandable. My wife had called my attention, several times, to the pattern the mark of white hair made on the animal’s body. Remember, I told you this cat had a splotch of white hair that was the only difference between him and Pluto. The white hair slowly began to take on a specific shape. It was the image of a hangman’s noose complete with scaffold for dropping men to their death! What a horrible shape! What a sad image and terrible machine of agony and of death!

Now I was indeed wretched beyond the wretchedness of simple humanity. This simple animal was causing me, made in the image of the high God, much suffering and anguish. I could get no rest at this point. During the day, the animal left me no moment alone. During the night, I would be awakened from my dreams to find the hot breath of the thing in my face. I had no power to shake off this nightmare that was upon my heart!

The pressure of this torture finally made the little bit of good that remained within me to go away. Evil thoughts became my only thoughts. The darkest and most evil thoughts guided me. My usual moodiness became a hatred of all things and of all people. During all of my violence and blind rage, my wife was the most usual and patient of sufferers.

One day she went with me upon some household chore into the cellar of the old building our poverty had us forced to live in. The cat followed me down the steep stairs and almost tripped me as I walked. Picking up an axe, I forgot in my anger the childish dread which had up unto now kept me from killing the animal. I aimed a blow at the animal which would have been instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. This blow, however, was stopped by the hand of my wife. This interference forced me into a rage more than demonical. I took my arm from her hold and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead on the spot without a sound.

This horrible murder now accomplished, I began to make plans for hiding her body. I knew I could not remove it from the house, during the day or night, without the risk of being seen by the neighbors. Many ideas entered my mind. At one point, I thought of cutting the corpse into tiny pieces and destroying them by fire. At another time, I planned to dig a grave for it in the floor of the cellar. Again, I thought about throwing it in the well in the yard or packing it in a box and mailing it from the house. Finally I hit upon what I considered a far better idea than any of these. I would wall it up in the cellar of the house.

For this purpose, the cellar was perfect. Its walls were loosely constructed and had recently been refinished with a rough plaster. The dampness of the cellar had kept the plaster from hardening and in one corner there was an old chimney that had been filled in to look like the rest of the wall. I was sure I could take out some bricks from this old chimney, insert the corpse, and wall it up so no eye could detect anything suspicious.

I was not wrong with this idea. Using a crowbar, I easily took out some of the bricks in this chimney and carefully laid the body inside the chimney. I then replaced all the bricks and made a plaster that exactly matched that of the basement. When I had finished, I felt satisfied that all was right. The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. The trash on the floor was picked up with the greatest of care. I looked around triumphantly and said to myself, “Here at least, my work has not been in vain.”

My next step was to look for the beast which had been the cause of so much horribleness. I had firmly decided to put the cat to death. Had I been able to find it at that moment, there could have been no doubt about its fate, but it appeared that the tricky animal had been frightened at the violence of my previous anger and hid itself from my present mood. It is impossible to describe the peacefulness that I felt now that the hated animal was gone. It did not show itself the entire night, and for once since its introduction to my house, I slept soundly and peacefully. Yes, I slept well even with the burden of murder on my soul.

The second and the third day passed and still the tormenting animal did not show up. Once again I breathed as a free man. The monster, in terror, had fled from my home forever! I should have to see it no more! My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me very little. A few people had asked questions about my wife, but I easily answered these. Even a search for her had been started but of course nothing was to be found. I looked upon my future freedom as secure.

Four days after I had murdered my wife, a group of policemen came, very unexpectedly, into the house and again made a careful investigation of the premises. I was sure no one would ever be able to tell where I had hidden the body of my wife. I felt no embarrassment at all about having the police there. The officers asked me to follow them in their search. They left nothing uncovered anywhere in the house. After a while, they went a third or fourth time into the cellar. This did not bother me at all. My heart beat calmly as one who is innocent. I walked all around the cellar with my arms crossed on my chest. The police were satisfied and were getting ready to leave. The glee at my heart was too strong to be stopped. It was killing me not to say a word in triumph and to make the police doubly sure of my innocence.

“Gentlemen,” I said at last, as the group started up the steps, “I am delighted that I have shown you I had nothing to hide. I wish you all good health and the next time, a little more courtesy toward me when you visit. Gentlemen, this is a very well constructed house.” (In my crazy desire to say something, I barely knew what I was saying at all.) “I may say this is an excellently well constructed house. These walls - are you going gentlemen? These walls are solidly put together.” In all of my crazy bragging, I rapped heavily with a cane, which I held in my hand, on the very section of brickwork where I had hidden the body of my wife.

May God protect and deliver me from the fangs of the Arch-Enemy! No sooner had the echoes of the blows of my cane sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice inside the tomb! It was a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly grew into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly weird, and inhuman. It was a howl, a wailing yell, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have come only out of hell from the cries of the damned or from the demons who get joy from their damnation.

Of my own thoughts, it is crazy to speak about. Fainting, I staggered to the opposite wall. For a second, the police on the stairs remained motionless through extreme terror and surprise. In the next moment a dozen strong arms were working at tearing down the wall. The wall finally fell. The corpse of my wife, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, was propped up in front of the spectators. On her head, with a red extended mouth and a single eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose trickiness had caused me to commit murder, and whose informing voice had sent me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up inside the tomb.